

Message Text

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ACTION AF-18

INFO OCT-01 EUR-25 ISO-00 IO-14 SS-20 NSC-10 CIAE-00

INR-10 NSAE-00 RSC-01 PRS-01 CPR-02 DRC-01 /103 W

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R 171210Z NOV 73

FM AMEMBASSY PARIS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4849

INFO AMEMBASSY LIBREVILLE

USMISSION USUN

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: OVIP (BONGO)

SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR IRWIN'S MEETING WITH PRESIDENT BONGO
CONCERNING WIFE'S TRIP TO US

REF: STATE 223321, LIBREVILLE 1002, STATE 223810

1. AMBASSADOR IRWIN CALLED ON PRESIDENT AND MADAME BONGO EVENING OF NOVEMBER 15 AT RESIDENCE OF GABONESE AMBASSADOR IN PARIS TO EXPRESS REGRET OF USG OVER THE UNFORTUNATE DIFFICULTIES ENCOUNTERED BY MADAME BONGO DURING HER RECENT US VISIT. AMBASSADOR OBSERVED THAT PROBLEMS COULD HAVE BEEN LARGELY AVOIDED HAD THE DEPARTMENT BEEN FURNISHED ADEQUATE ADVANCE INFORMATION ON HER TRIP.

2. PRESIDENT BONGO, SPEAKING FOR HIMSELF AND WIFE, ACCEPTED "GRACIOUS APOLOGY" OF AMBASSADOR AND USG. HE NOTED IMMEDIATELY THAT PROBLEMS WERE PARTIALLY FAULT OF GOG; SPECIFICALLY, THAT THEIR NEW AMBASSADOR TO THE UN HAD FAILED TO PASS WORD OF MADAME BONGO'S ARRIVAL TO THE GABONESE AMBASSADOR IN WASHINGTON. IN THE CASE OF PREVIOUS TRIPS, WHEN ADVANCE INFORMATION HAD BEEN PROVIDED TO USG, FULL ASSISTANCE HAD INVARIABLY BEEN FORTHCOMING.

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3. IN LIGHT OF GOG'S FAILURE TO INFORM USG, BONGO CONTINUED, THE ACTIONS OF THE CUSTOMS OFFICIALS WERE ONLY THOSE OF A "FUNCTIONARY DOING HIS DUTY." HE WOULD HAVE EXPECTED NO LESS OF GABONESE CUSTOMS OFFICIALS UNDER SIMILAR CIRCUMSTANCES.

4. BONGO NOTED THAT AMBASSADOR IRWIN'S "GRACIOUS GESTURE" IN TAKING THE TROUBLE TO CALL, AND THE USG'S COURTESY IN EXTENDING AN APOLOGY, MERELY SERVED AS CONFIRMATION OF THE EXCELLENT RELATIONS EXISTING BETWEEN GABON AND US -- "EVEN BETTER THAN GABON'S RELATIONS WITH FRANCE."

5. BONGO TOOK PAINS TO STRESS THE STRONG PERSONAL ATTACHMENT HE, HIS WIFE AND CHILDREN FELT FOR THE US AND HOW MUCH THEY APPRECIATED THEIR AMERICAN VISITS, AS WELL AS BONGO'S OPPORTUNITY TO MEET WITH PRESIDENT NIXON LAST AUGUST. WITH SUCH TIES, BONGO ASKED RHETORICALLY, HOW COULD HE HAVE HARD FEELINGS ABOUT A MINOR MISUNDERSTANDING?

6. MRS. BONGO SAT BY HER HUSBAND'S SIDE THROUGH MOST OF THE MEETING, HER ONLY COMMENTS LIMITED TO AN OCCASIONAL NOD OF THE HEAD IN CONFIRMATION OF HER HUSBAND'S STATEMENTS.
IRWIN

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: n/a
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 17 NOV 1973
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: morefirh
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1973PARIS29701
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Film Number: n/a
From: PARIS
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1973/newtext/t19731127/aaaaatoi.tel
Line Count: 87
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE
Office: ACTION AF
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators:
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: STATE 223321, LIBREVILLE 1002, STATE
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: morefirh
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 29 AUG 2001
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <29-Aug-2001 by shawdg>; APPROVED <26-Nov-2001 by morefirh>
Review Markings:

Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
30 JUN 2005

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: AMBASSADOR IRWIN'S MEETING WITH PRESIDENT BONGO CONCERNING WIFE'S TRIP TO US
TAGS: OVIP, (BONGO)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005